



Ministry of
Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Contact: Amanda Dauk

101-3085 Albert Street, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN S4S 0B1

Telephone: (306) 787-5157, Fax: (306) 787-0216

Internet Page: <http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca>



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GRAZING MENTORS ARE IN DEMAND

Producers interested in improving their grazing management are urged to sign up for this year's "Grazing Mentorship Program." The program is operated by the Saskatchewan Forage Council with funding from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"The program is designed to hook grazing mentors up with individuals who are looking to take their grazing management to the next level, or even just the first level," said provincial co-ordinator Ross MacDonald. "It's a means of co-ordinating peer-to-peer grazing information and mentorship."

The idea is to allow individual producers to work one-on-one with experienced grazing managers in order to learn how to improve their profits, efficiency, forage productivity, and use of water and land resources.

"We have a number of grazing mentors across the province, so there's likely a mentor nearby," MacDonald said. "The majority of our mentors are quite experienced. A lot of them have dealt with intensive grazing, grazing large numbers of animals, grazing late into the winter season with both stockpiled forages and bale grazing, as well as alternative supply methods."

The program is partially subsidized, so producers pay only a fraction of the actual cost. Producers are asked to pay a \$100 application fee, and the program kicks in an additional \$600 to pay the mentor for his or her time.

"It is equivalent to about 16 hours, or two days, of mentoring. Depending on the individual's needs, those 16 hours can be split up however the two participants feel will work best," MacDonald said.

"Usually there is an initial visit, some discussion about where each is at, some things to think about, some correspondence in between, and possibly another meeting in the field season."

The discussion can range right across the grazing management spectrum, including fencing, watering systems, plant growth, forage species selection, dormant season grazing – just about anything a producer might have questions about. There is no limitation on the size of operation that can become involved.

"We've had a range of mentorships, from individuals who are just getting started with small numbers and smaller land bases, to those who are going from a small operation to a larger operation," MacDonald said. "Mentors say they sometimes learn as much as they teach when dealing with more experienced operators."

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There are currently 12 mentors available in the province, with space for approximately 55 producers to receive their assistance, so it is advisable to sign up as soon as possible. Interested producers should contact the Saskatchewan Forage Council by visiting their website at www.saskforage.ca, or by calling MacDonald directly at (306) 447-4600.

MacDonald is an animal and range agrologist who is also an active rancher, running a herd of some 400 custom-grazed yearlings and a small cow-calf herd. He says the mentorship program is just a case of well-organized networking with peers.

"The intent is not necessarily to prescribe any sort of management, but to provide a producer sounding-board for ideas or innovations, and hopefully to save people some mistakes and some time," he said.

"If nothing else, it's a great opportunity to get some outside ideas or just confirmation that you're on the right track."

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For more information, contact:

Ross MacDonald, Co-ordinator
Grazing Mentorship Program

Phone: (306) 447-4600

E-mail: rossmacdonald@xplornet.com



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A VALUABLE NEW RESOURCE FOR PULSE GROWERS

Knowledge is power when it comes to making seeding and selling decisions. A new initiative from the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG) is aimed at giving pulse producers market insight like they have never had before.

The first monthly edition of SPG's Green Lentil Market Report was mailed early in the new year, but the publication is also available anytime via e-mail or on the SPG website at www.saskpulse.com.

SPG Executive Director Garth Patterson says the Green Lentil Market Report is a direct response to producer need.

"We were getting feedback from green lentil producers who were concerned about low prices, and we had a few studies to look at what may be causing them," Patterson said.

"When we got down to the crux of it, we were in a situation of over-production that was causing the low prices. So, based on meetings, interviews and surveys with farmers and other industry stakeholders, we concluded that by getting better information out to farmers and providing more assistance in their production marketing decisions, we could help them more closely match supply with demand."

The Green Lentil Market Report will have two main sections. The first segment, entitled "The Bears and the Bulls," and will feature market commentary. The second area will highlight market analysis, created specifically for the publication, from STAT Publishing's Brian Clancey.

"Based on Brian's contacts in the trade and his knowledge of the industry, he is putting together data that is not available from any other source," Patterson said. "A good example is that he has production, export, supply and demand information broken out by market class. Instead of just reporting green lentil, which is typical of what we would see, he's reporting large green, medium green and small green."

"We thought this was really important, because those are very different markets, and that information hasn't been readily available to producers."

Patterson says the goal is to provide producers with greater knowledge in order to minimize the risk surrounding planting and marketing decisions.

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After 16 months of publishing the Green Lentil Market Report, the SPG will re-evaluate it to gauge its effectiveness. For now, the group is optimistic about the impact of the new initiative.

"We are really excited about the project," Patterson said. "We believe in the value of the information being provided, and are happy to be able to work with a variety of contributors offering their own personal insights into the green lentil market."

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For more information, contact:

Garth Patterson, Executive Director
Saskatchewan Pulse Growers
Phone: (306) 668-6676



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MARKET PROSPECTS 2008: A TOOL IN THE BATTLE FOR ACRES

There is a battle looming – a battle for acres.

Spring may be a way off, but producers are already starting to weigh their crop options for the coming growing season. The decision is always a difficult one – but with commodity prices strong almost across the board, producers will face an even tougher choice this year.

The University of Saskatchewan's "Market Prospects" television program, shown weekly through the winter on CTV's *Farmgate*, aims to help producers make those decisions.

The series, now in its twenty-third year, provides market analysis and forecasts for livestock, grains, oilseeds and specialty crops every Saturday from now until late April.

Market Prospects delivers timely commodity market and outlook information through interviews with leading experts and analysts, who provide specific price forecasts for individual crops.

Dr. Larry Gutek, the Manager of the Crop Business Section for the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture and a member of the Market Prospects 2008 planning committee, says this year's market factors are unique.

"The markets have changed, and the grain industry will be competing for acres," Gutek observed. "The main competition will be for wheat and canola acres, so market information now and at planting time is essential. Producers should consider the cost of production, seed costs, rotation and other factors in addition to market information."

Gutek says the knowledge and insight gained from a program like Market Prospects can be a valuable tool for producers as they develop their seeding plans to adjust to market pulls in the grain industry.

The topics that will be featured in the 2008 season focus on many areas of importance to individual farm operations and to the overall agricultural industry. Among the subjects that will be covered are: cattle markets; the U.S. perspective on various crops; the world oilseed outlook; pulse crops; oats and hulless barley; CWB crops; and special crops such as mustard and canaryseed.

Market Prospects also provides information for Prairie farmers on other topics of interest. For example, the sustainability of Prairie agriculture in terms of human health, transportation and the environment will receive attention this season.

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The series is co-ordinated by the Department of Bioresource Policy, Business and Economics (PBE) at the University of Saskatchewan, in co-operation with CTV.

Financial support for Market Prospects 2008 has been provided by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture.

It is estimated that more than 75,000 viewers in the province watch the show each week. It is also available across Canada through satellite television.

More information on the program, including the schedule and archived video of interviews, can be obtained on the Market Prospects website at www.marketprospects.usask.ca, or by calling the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture's Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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For more information, contact:

Dr. Larry Gutek, Manager, Crop Business Section
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
Phone: (306) 933-5568
E-mail: lgutek@agr.gov.sk.ca



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KNOW YOUR BUSINESS RISK MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

A new suite of business risk management (BRM) programs is being offered by the provincial and federal governments.

Producers should be looking in the mail for notification from the federal government of their options under the new business risk management programs.

"The former Agriculture Policy Framework, which expires at the end of March, will be replaced with the new Growing Forward framework," said Maury Harvey, Manager of the Business Risk Management Unit at the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture. "Agriculture ministers have agreed to ensure continuity in non-BRM programs for up to one year, beginning April 1, 2008. Federal, provincial and territorial staff are working together to put the necessary agreements in place to ensure a seamless transition for our delivery agents and clients. However, the BRM programs under Growing Forward are rolling out now."

Federal and provincial governments recently agreed to implement AgriInvest. This new program replaces the coverage under the old Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program for margin losses of less than 15 per cent.

"Last fall, the federal and provincial governments undertook consultations with producers to find out what they wanted from business risk management programs," Harvey said. "Something that was heard consistently from producers was: 'Why can't we have something like we had with NISA?'"

Through AgriInvest, producers and governments contribute to an account, and producers can use the funds to address small declines in income or to make investments. Producers can deposit up to 1.5 per cent of their allowable net sales into an AgriInvest account, and have it matched by government. There will be no triggers in the first year of the program, so producers will have full discretion as to when they access those funds.

To assist in building up those accounts, the federal government is offering what is called the Kickstart program. A one-time federal contribution of \$600 million is being made to help producers seed their accounts to get an initial balance going. Producers are receiving letters from the federal government notifying them of what they have available, based on their historic Allowable Net Sales.

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Producers do not have to make a matching contribution or open a bank account in order to receive their Kickstart money. They simply have to respond to the letter. Producers who have not received a letter should contact the program administration for information on how to apply.

Two other risk management programs with features similar to previous programs have also been launched. AgriStability offers margin coverage of up to 85 per cent.

"In other words, producers would have to drop below 85 per cent of their historic average margin to be eligible for funds from this program," Harvey explained.

The other program is AgriInsurance. It offers premium-paid production insurance for specified perils such as weather, pests and disease, and has been expanded to include more commodities.

Included in the new package, agreed to in principle by governments, is something called *AgriRecovery*, which is intended to drive the nature of responses to agriculture disaster scenarios in the future.

It sets in place a process to respond to disasters in the event that they create losses that are not adequately compensated for by existing programs. According to Harvey, "It recognizes the fact that agricultural disasters are unpredictable, so it's sometimes difficult to design a program until the disaster hits."

Harvey stresses it is important for producers to make sure they are fully informed on the details of the various business risk management options.

"Producers that are in CAIS or who have received program payments will be receiving documents in the mail in regard to their eligibility and coverage options," he said. "If producers have historically not been in programs, they should look closely at the new programs and seriously consider signing up if they think it's something that can work for them."

Full details of the business risk management programs are available via the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada website at www.agr.gc.ca, as well as the department's toll-free inquiry line at 1-866-367-8506. Producer information sessions are being staged across Saskatchewan after February 4. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance offices will also have information on hand.

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For more information, contact:

Maury Harvey, Manager, Business Risk Management Unit
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
Phone: (306) 787-8162
E-mail: mharvey@agr.gov.sk.ca



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FLAX PRODUCERS GATHER TO DISCUSS STRAW MANAGEMENT

With 25 per cent of Saskatchewan farmers reporting at least some flax production, searching for new value-added opportunities for flax straw is a quest that can benefit many producers. It is the focus of the "Effective Straw Management Workshop" coming up in Saskatoon.

The workshop is organized by the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission, otherwise known as SaskFlax, a producer-driven organization aimed at increasing awareness and sales of flax-based products.

"The objective is to bring together producers, researchers, equipment manufacturers, government and other industry stakeholders to take a look at what we've been doing for the past couple of years as it relates to flax straw management," said SaskFlax Executive Director Linda Braun. "It includes breeding programs, agronomic practices, and some of the new harvest technologies that we've been trying out."

The workshop will be held February 12 and 13 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Saskatoon. Sessions begin at 11:00 a.m. on the first day and will wrap up with presentations concluding at 4:30 p.m. on the second day.

The agenda combines presentations by researchers, agronomists, and various industry representatives who work with products based on flax fibre, flaxseed and flax oil.

"What we're trying to do is reduce that crop residue, with the ultimate goal of ending the need for burning, and adding value to that straw," Braun said.

Much of the SaskFlax research results from support by the Canada-Saskatchewan Agri-Environmental Group Plan.

"We've been fortunate to be working with that plan for the last couple of years," Braun noted. "They've given us some grant dollars to take a look at some of the beneficial management practices that we might be able to adopt in order to decrease burning."

Those attending will have the opportunity to share their experiences, identify challenges and opportunities, and assist in the development of the beneficial practices.

(more)

"I'm really excited that farmers are talking to farmers," Braun said. "Whether or not they are looking at managing residue or creating new value from flax straw, once you put producers together in a room, they start having ideas, and collectively we're coming up with some solutions to the issue of straw burning."

Canada is the largest producer of flaxseed in the world, representing approximately 40 per cent of the world's supply. Saskatchewan is the largest producer among Canadian provinces, with an estimated 16,000 farmers growing the crop.

Among the presentations featured at the workshop will be information from Forbo, a Swiss company that is the world's largest producer of linoleum flooring, 30 per cent of which is flax oil.

"Flax is one of the best crops for the new bio-economy," Braun stated.

The Effective Straw Management Workshop has a registration fee of \$100. The complete agenda, program information and registration details can be found online at www.saskflax.com.

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For more information, contact:

Linda Braun, Executive Director
SaskFlax
Phone: (306) 664-1901
E-mail: saskflax@saskflax.com



